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Criminal Justice System Digitisation: Interoperable Criminal Justice System (ICJS), New Criminal Laws and Digital Transformation of Justice Delivery

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Recent Developments:

- The **Union Ministry of Home Affairs** has announced that from **January 1, 2027**, investigation and trial-related procedures under the new criminal laws are expected to be recorded digitally through the **Interoperable Criminal Justice System (ICJS)**.
- The move aims to create a fully integrated digital criminal justice ecosystem connecting police, courts, prisons, forensic laboratories and prosecution agencies.
- The initiative gained importance after the implementation of three new criminal laws on **July 1, 2024**:
- **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)** replacing the **Indian Penal Code (IPC)**.
- **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)** replacing the **Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)**.
- **Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam (BSA)** replacing the **Indian Evidence Act**.
- The new laws emphasise digital procedures, forensic investigation and technology-based coordination among criminal justice institutions.

Interoperable Criminal Justice System (ICJS):

Concept and Objective:

- **ICJS** is a national digital platform designed to integrate different pillars of the criminal justice system on a single network.
- It aims to establish an end-to-end digital workflow covering:
- **First Information Report (FIR) registration**
- Investigation
- Chargesheet filing
- Trial proceedings
- Final disposal of cases
- The platform seeks to replace fragmented paper-based processes with a transparent, faster and interconnected justice delivery mechanism.

Major Components Connected Through ICJS:

- **Police:** FIR registration, investigation records and crime tracking.
- **Courts:** Electronic case records, judicial proceedings and case management.
- **Prisons:** Prisoner information and custody-related data.
- **Forensic laboratories:** Scientific evidence generation and sharing.
- **Prosecution:** Coordination between investigation agencies and legal authorities.

Data Infrastructure:

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- Data generated through the system is stored on **MeghRaj**, the Government of India's cloud computing platform.
- The system enables authorised agencies to access criminal justice information through a common digital framework.

Digital Implementation under New Criminal Laws:

Need for Digital Transformation:

- The three new criminal laws require stronger technological integration for:
- Faster investigations,
- Digital evidence management,
- Better forensic support,
- Improved coordination among justice institutions.
- Digital recording of procedures aims to reduce delays and improve accountability.

Current Progress and Implementation Status:

FIR Digital Transmission Challenge:

- Data from the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** shows that only around **46% of FIRs** were digitally transmitted to courts.
- Digital transmission of FIRs, also known as court consumption of FIRs, indicates whether police records are electronically shared and received by judicial authorities.
- The low percentage shows that the digital criminal justice chain is still incomplete.

Implementation of New Criminal Laws:

- Since the introduction of the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita**, millions of FIRs have been registered under the new legal framework.
- The **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita** has also enabled registration of **Zero FIRs**, allowing complaints to be filed irrespective of jurisdiction.
- Police authorities cannot refuse registration of a **Zero FIR** and the complaint is later transferred to the appropriate police station.

Crime and Criminal Tracking and Network Systems (CCTNS):

Role of CCTNS:

- FIR registration is carried out through the **Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS)** platform.
- The platform connects around **16,000 police stations** across India.
- It supports case registration in multiple Indian languages, improving accessibility.

Language Technology Support:

- The **Bhashini** platform helps translate Zero FIRs into the language required by the jurisdiction where the case is transferred.
- This supports linguistic inclusion in criminal justice administration.

State-Level Progress in Criminal Justice Digitisation:

Performance Across States and Union Territories:

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- Several States and Union Territories have achieved complete implementation of criminal justice digitisation parameters.
- States such as **Haryana, Goa, Assam, Punjab and Chandigarh** have implemented all major parameters.
- Many other States and Union Territories are performing above the national average.
- Some northeastern regions face slower progress mainly due to connectivity and infrastructure challenges.

Forensic Infrastructure Expansion:

Importance under New Criminal Laws:

- The new criminal laws make forensic examination mandatory for offences punishable with **7 years or more imprisonment**.
- This shift increases dependence on scientific investigation and evidence-based policing.

Growth of Forensic Capacity:

- The number of forensic laboratories increased from **129 in 2023** to **154 in 2025**.
- More than **700 mobile forensic units** have been deployed to improve crime scene investigation.

Rising Forensic Demand:

- Forensic laboratories received increased cases, showing rising demand for scientific investigation.
- Although pending cases have reduced, expanding forensic capacity remains necessary for effective implementation.

Improvement in National Implementation Performance:

Progress Indicators:

- The national implementation score under new criminal laws increased from **46.47% in January 2025** to **70.06% in June 2026**.
- Other improvements include:
 - **60-day chargesheet compliance** improving significantly.
 - **90-day chargesheet compliance** showing better performance.
 - Millions of digital evidence identification records generated.
 - Increased use of electronic summons.

National Police Database and Data Integration:

Scale of Criminal Justice Data:

- The national police database has become one of the largest criminal justice information repositories in India.
- It contains:
 - Police records,
 - FIR details,
 - Chargesheets,
 - Investigation-related information.
- Access to integrated data helps police and investigating agencies improve coordination and decision-making.

Challenges in Criminal Justice Digitisation:

Infrastructure and Connectivity Issues:

- Uneven internet connectivity, especially in remote and northeastern regions, affects digital implementation.

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- Rural and difficult geographical areas require stronger digital infrastructure.

Interoperability and Standardisation:

- Different States and agencies need uniform procedures for smooth data exchange.
- Effective integration among police, courts, prisons, prosecution and forensic systems remains a major challenge.

Human Resource and Training Challenges:

- Police personnel, judicial officers and other stakeholders require continuous training to effectively use digital platforms.
- Technology adoption must be supported by institutional capacity building.

Data Security and Privacy Concerns:

- Large-scale criminal databases require strong cybersecurity mechanisms.
- Protection of sensitive personal information is essential while ensuring lawful access.

Significance of Digital Criminal Justice System:

Potential Benefits:

- **Faster investigations** through real-time information sharing.
- **Reduced delays** in chargesheet filing and trials.
- **Improved evidence management** through digital records and forensic integration.
- **Greater transparency and accountability** in criminal justice processes.
- **Better coordination** among different justice institutions.

Limitations:

- Low FIR transmission rates and uneven implementation show that digital transformation is still incomplete.
- The success of ICJS depends not only on technological design but also on reliable everyday functioning across institutions.

Way Forward:

Strengthening Digital Justice Delivery:

- Improve connectivity and digital infrastructure across all regions.
- Ensure complete integration among criminal justice institutions.
- Develop strong cybersecurity and data protection mechanisms.
- Provide continuous training to personnel.
- Promote technology-enabled, citizen-centric and transparent justice delivery.

UPSC Value Addition:

Important Concepts:

- **Interoperability:** Ability of different institutions and digital systems to exchange and use information effectively.
- **Digital Evidence:** Electronic information used for investigation and judicial proceedings.
- **Zero FIR:** FIR registered at any police station irrespective of territorial jurisdiction and later transferred to the concerned police station.

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- **Forensic Investigation:** Use of scientific methods for crime investigation and evidence collection.
- **Digital Public Infrastructure:** Technology-based shared platforms that enable large-scale public service delivery.

Constitutional and Governance Linkages:

- **Article 21:** Right to life and personal liberty includes access to fair and speedy justice.
- **Article 39A:** Promotion of equal justice and free legal aid.
- **Seventh Schedule:** Police and public order are primarily State subjects.

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Disability Rights and Welfare in India: Towards a Rights-based, Inclusive and Dignified Framework

Recent Developments:

- The issue of **disability rights and welfare** has gained renewed attention due to demands for a uniform, rights-based and dignified welfare framework for **Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)**.
- Experts have highlighted the need for a **Minimum Universal Disability Pension Floor Rate** to ensure that every eligible person with disability receives a nationally guaranteed minimum level of social security irrespective of State of residence.
- The implementation of the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016** has expanded the disability framework from **7 to 21 recognised disabilities**, but effective implementation, accessibility and social inclusion remain major challenges.
- The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)** continues to guide India's disability policy towards equality, dignity and non-discrimination.

Need for a Rights-based Disability Welfare Framework:

From Welfare Approach to Rights Approach:

- A **rights-based disability framework** treats Persons with Disabilities as equal citizens entitled to dignity, accessibility, social security, employment opportunities and public support.
- It moves away from viewing disability welfare as charity or government discretion and focuses on empowerment, equality and participation.

Major Reasons for Reform:

- **Exclusion:**
- Despite progress through **Digital India, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** and digital service delivery, many Persons with Disabilities remain excluded due to barriers related to documentation, certification, accessibility and service delivery.
- **Inadequate Social Security:**
- Disability pensions in several States remain extremely low, often around **₹300 to ₹500 per month**, which is insufficient for healthcare, mobility support and dignified living.
- **Regional Inequality:**
- Disability support varies significantly among States due to differences in budgets, administrative capacity and policy priorities.
- Social security and dignity should not depend upon geographical location.
- **Low Public Investment:**
- India spends only around **0.02% of GDP** on disability welfare, indicating limited fiscal priority despite a large population of Persons with Disabilities.
- **Economic Impact:**

- Exclusion of Persons with Disabilities from education, employment and social security reduces economic participation and creates productivity losses.
- **Constitutional Requirement:**
- A rights-based framework is necessary to implement constitutional principles of equality, dignity and the right to life effectively.

Current Status of Persons with Disabilities in India:

Population and Demographic Profile:

- According to **Census 2011**, India has around **2.68 crore Persons with Disabilities**, constituting approximately **2.21% of the total population**.
- Disability prevalence is higher among males compared to females, with rural areas reporting higher prevalence than urban areas.

Recognised Disabilities under Law:

- The **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016** recognises **21 types of disabilities**, including:
 - Locomotor disability,
 - Visual impairment,
 - Hearing impairment,
 - Speech and language disability,
 - Intellectual disability,
 - Cerebral palsy,
 - Dwarfism,
 - Multiple disabilities.

Constitutional and Policy Framework:

Constitutional Provisions:

- **Preamble:**
- Guarantees **Justice, Liberty and Equality** to all citizens, forming the foundation for disability rights.
- **Fundamental Rights:**
- Fundamental Rights under **Part III** apply equally to Persons with Disabilities, including:
 - Equality,
 - Freedom,
 - Protection against exploitation,
 - Cultural and educational rights,
 - Constitutional remedies.
- **Directive Principles of State Policy:**
- **Article 41** directs the State to provide public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disability within its economic capacity.

Role of Local Governments:

- **Eleventh Schedule:**
- Includes social welfare, including welfare of disadvantaged groups, under Panchayati Raj institutions.
- **Twelfth Schedule:**
- Includes safeguarding interests of weaker sections, including persons with disabilities, under urban local bodies.

Major Policies and Legal Frameworks:

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Important Laws and Initiatives:

- **National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2006:**
- Aims to ensure equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation of Persons with Disabilities.
- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:**
- India ratified the convention in **2008**, leading to stronger rights-based disability legislation.
- **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016:**
- Replaced the earlier disability law and expanded recognised disabilities from **7 to 21**.
- Focuses on:
 - Equality,
 - Non-discrimination,
 - Accessibility,
 - Reservation,
 - Social security.
- **National Trust Act, 1999:**
- Provides welfare support for persons with autism, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability and multiple disabilities.
- **Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992:**
- Established the **Rehabilitation Council of India** as a statutory body to regulate rehabilitation professionals and training standards.
- **Scheme for Implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act:**
- Focuses on skill development and empowerment of Persons with Disabilities.

Judicial Developments:

Important Supreme Court Observations:

- **Rajive Raturi vs Union of India (2024):**
- The Supreme Court recognised accessibility as a constitutional requirement under **Article 21**.
- It linked accessibility with dignity, freedom of movement and meaningful equality.
- The Court highlighted the importance of digital inclusion for preventing exclusion.
- **Reserve Bank of India vs A. K. Nair and Others (2023):**
- The Supreme Court recognised that the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016** provides for reservation in promotions for Persons with Disabilities as per government rules.

Challenges Faced by Persons with Disabilities:

Infrastructure and Accessibility:

- Public buildings, transport systems and urban spaces often lack:
 - Ramps,
 - Elevators,
 - Tactile pathways,
 - Universal design features.
- Limited accessibility reduces independence and mobility of Persons with Disabilities.

Education Barriers:

- Challenges include:
 - Inaccessible schools,
 - Shortage of trained teachers,
 - Limited assistive technology,
 - Weak inclusive education systems.

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- Literacy among Persons with Disabilities remains lower than the national average.

Employment Challenges:

- Persons with Disabilities face:
- Workplace discrimination,
- Lack of reasonable accommodation,
- Inaccessible workplaces,
- Social prejudice.
- A large number of employable Persons with Disabilities remain outside formal employment.

Healthcare Challenges:

- Many healthcare facilities lack:
- Disability-friendly infrastructure,
- Trained medical staff,
- Specialised equipment.
- The **COVID-19 pandemic** highlighted difficulties faced by Persons with Disabilities in accessing essential healthcare services.

Digital and Legal Barriers:

- Increasing digitalisation of welfare, education, banking and governance can create exclusion when platforms are inaccessible.
- Weak enforcement of accessibility standards under disability laws remains a major concern.

Measures Required for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities:

Identification and Social Security:

- India needs a reliable disability identification system through:
- Centralised digital databases,
- Accessible disability certificates,
- Portability across States,
- Regular verification mechanisms.
- A **Minimum Universal Disability Pension Floor Rate** can ensure a nationally guaranteed minimum support system.

Accessibility Reform:

- Public infrastructure and digital platforms should follow **Universal Design Principles**.
- Required measures include:
- Accessible buildings,
- Barrier-free transport,
- Sign language support,
- Captioning,
- Screen-reader compatible websites,
- Enforcement of accessibility standards.

Inclusive Education:

- Inclusive education requires:
- Special educators,

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- Adapted curriculum,
- Assistive technologies,
- Early identification of disabilities.
- **Samagra Shiksha** and **National Education Policy 2020** should include stronger disability-specific strategies.

Employment and Skill Development:

- Employment opportunities can be improved through:
- Skill development,
- Employer incentives,
- Workplace accommodation,
- Job matching platforms.
- Schemes supporting disability skill development should expand to rural areas and digital employment platforms.

Awareness and Social Inclusion:

- Disability sensitisation should be included in training of:
- Government officials,
- Police,
- Judiciary,
- Teachers,
- Healthcare workers,
- Employers.
- Public campaigns should shift social attitudes from sympathy towards dignity, capability and equal citizenship.

Way Forward:

Building an Inclusive Disability Framework:

- India needs to move from welfare-based support towards empowerment-based disability governance.
- Priority areas include:
- Early intervention,
- Inclusive education,
- Accessible infrastructure,
- Employment opportunities,
- Strong implementation mechanisms.
- A rights-based approach can ensure that Persons with Disabilities become active contributors to India's development journey.

UPSC Value Addition:

Important Concepts:

- **Rights-based Approach:** Treating Persons with Disabilities as equal rights holders rather than beneficiaries of charity.
- **Universal Design:** Designing products, services and infrastructure usable by all people without special adaptation.
- **Reasonable Accommodation:** Necessary modifications to ensure equal participation of Persons with Disabilities.

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- **Social Security:** Public measures providing protection against economic and social vulnerabilities.

Important Constitutional Linkages:

- **Article 14:** Equality before law.
- **Article 21:** Right to life and dignity.
- **Article 41:** Public assistance in cases of disability and unemployment.

Article 46: Promotion of interests of weaker sections